

IN SUPPORT of RM-11699:

As a retired Chief of Operations for the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency with a long-time career in "real-life emergency management, I fully support the ability to allow the provision of obscuring data transmitted over Amateur Radio, especially when Amateur radio is assisting government and non-government agencies during any disaster.

In my experience, agencies such as Emergency Management, Hospitals, as well as other such organizations involved in a disaster have policies that require them to obscure data in order to both protect those in harms way and for the protection of the agency sending and receiving the data. This is simple common and serves many purposes, including victim privacy and reducing "rubberneckers" who race to the scene after hearing something on the radio and who then get in the way of first responders. It also allows proper notification of family members by proper authority, rather than having victim's names splashed all over the media.

Amateur radio is used extensively as in an Auxiliary Communications mode during response to disasters, and in my experience, has often proven to be critical to the life and property saving functions of Emergency Management. Being able to encrypt transmissions containing sensitive information will make Amateur radio even more valuable and usable during a disaster as it will then be better able to supplement or, if ultimately necessary, replace overstressed or destroyed public service communications operating as part of the Communications Unit in an Incident Command System structure under the National Incident Management System.

A failure to allow this will reduce the value and utility of Amateur radio in this regard. Based on my years of experience managing disasters such as the TN floods of 2020 and 2011, numerous tornadoes, winter storms, etc., the inability of the Auxiliary Communications team within the Communications Unit to encrypt sensitive information, could cost a life. And even if it only costs one life, that is one loss that could have been prevented.

Thus, my recommendation is to allow the limited encryption of data sent over Amateur Radio. That data must be authorized and vetted by a Public Service organization official and should be transmitted in an encrypted mode only with the knowledge and approval of the Communications Unit Leader managing the Communications Unit. The use should be limited to those times when absolutely necessary. Amateur Radio should not be allowed to encrypt traffic of any kind during "normal" Amateur activities and usage.